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Collection

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A Close Shave!

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FINAL DRAFT



Vanessa's mother looked around happily. "It's a
perfect house!" she exclaimed. "Can't you just
imagine a murder taking place here?"

Vanessa nodded and pushed aside the wispy white
curtains at the large bay window in the living room.
Outside, a wide expanse of green lawn swept to the top of a low
cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Vanessa's twin sister,
Samantha, was already walking along the cliff edge in the early
morning sunlight, trying to find the quickest path to the beach.

"Is somebody going to get shoved off that cliff?" Vanessa
asked innocently.

"Nope," her dad answered as he carried two overstuffed
suitcases inside. "I think that's too obvious. We need something
more... sinister, more...Gothic"

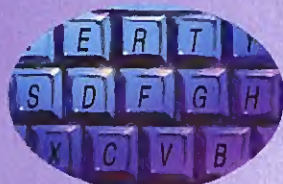
Vanessa smiled. Having a pair of scriptwriters for parents was
never dull. They had just got an offer to come up with a new
script for a scary murder mystery, so they'd simply rented the
spookiest home they could find on the coast of Cornwall and
packed up the family for the summer. Here they were, ready to
work on an idea.

"This place is great!" Samantha exclaimed, as she raced
inside. "The garden is huge and there's an old-fashioned swing.
Come on, Vanessa," she urged. "Let's go and explore."

"Not yet," their mum said. "These cases need to be unpacked."



By the time their mum called them downstairs for lunch, Vanessa and Samantha had put all of their things away in the beautiful old-fashioned bedroom they were to share. Their parents had set up the back room as an office and had already spent a couple of hours working.



Once the girls sat down at the table for lunch, their parents told them a little about the story.

"The ghost of the murdered woman comes back after ten years to identify her killer to the family who lived in the house after she died. They, of course, have no idea that the murder had ever taken place there," Vanessa's mum explained.

"I like the story so far," said Samantha. "It sounds really scary."

"Yeah, Mum," Vanessa agreed. "What happens next?"

Their mother leaned over the table as if about to share a secret with them. "The spirit leads one of the main characters – probably the daughter – to the murder weapon that has been hidden in the house all that time. The phantom will then lead somebody to her very own corpse."

Vanessa's dad took over the story. "The police think that the dead woman jumped off a cliff and her body was washed out to sea.

What they don't know is that she was really murdered by her cousin, who hid the body in the old well," he said.

"Did you think up the whole story this morning?" asked Vanessa.

Her mother smiled. "Well, we haven't exactly worked the whole plot out yet, but, yes, most of the idea just seemed to flow on to the computer."

"It's this old house," Vanessa's dad said. "I feel like it's focusing our creative energies... magnifying them."

"What made you think of using a well to hide the body?" Vanessa asked.

"There's an old well near the laurel hedge," their mother answered. "It gave us the idea."

"I didn't see a well," Samantha said. "And I walked all the way around that hedge this morning."

"It's there," her dad said. "Anyway, enough of the story. What do you say to a picnic on the beach tomorrow?"

Everyone agreed that it was a great idea, and for the moment the subject of the well – and the script – was forgotten.



After lunch, the girls walked the length of the overgrown laurel hedge, first up one side, then down the other.

"This must be it," Vanessa guessed, pointing to an ancient-looking grey stone well that was half hidden within a tangle of grass and wild rosebushes. The wooden crossbeam had an old bucket hanging from it by a rotting rope connected to a metal crank. Vanessa gave the crank handle a firm tug. "It's rusted solid," she said, with disappointment in her voice.

Samantha furrowed her brow. "That well was not here this morning. I would have seen it," she said.

"Come on, Sam," Vanessa said, laughing. "You just didn't notice it." In a spooky voice she added, "If this is a ghost well, then maybe there is a body down there." Vanessa pulled away several overhanging vines and exposed a wooden lid that sealed the well shut. After exhausting themselves trying to open it, they gave up and went home.

When they went to bed that night Vanessa was still too excited about being in the creepy old house to sleep. She listened to the soothing rhythm of the ocean waves rolling on to the nearby beach. Through the open window she could even hear crickets chirping. Vanessa listened more closely.

"Those aren't crickets," she thought, slipping out of bed. 'It must be the swing squeaking.' But when she went to the window she saw that the swing was hanging perfectly still in the moonlight. The noise was coming from the laurel hedge.

"What are you doing?" Samantha asked, joining her at the window.

"I heard something," Vanessa whispered.

"It sounds like somebody is twisting a big piece of metal," Samantha guessed.

Vanessa's eyes opened wide. "The well!" she gasped. "Maybe somebody's turning the crank!"

Samantha and Vanessa looked at each other, then turned their gaze to the darkness of the laurel hedge.

"There!" Samantha exclaimed, pointing out into the gloomy garden. "What's that moving down there?"

Vanessa squinted. She could barely make out the dark shadow at the far end of the hedge. It was creeping slowly towards the house. All at once she heard a sound on the stairs and grabbed Samantha's arm. It was coming closer, the steps creaking as it mounted them one by one.

"Don't forget to lock the front door," their mum called out to their dad from the top of the stairs.

Both girls sighed with relief. "We must have imagined it. We're letting this place get to us," Vanessa said, casting a final glance outside. Reassured that everything was as it should be, the girls went to bed.



The next night, the twins went to bed early after an exhausting day exploring the beach, swimming and picnicking with their parents. Vanessa snuggled under the covers and drifted off to sleep immediately. She woke up to the pressure of Samantha's hand around her wrist.

"What?" Vanessa asked drowsily. Samantha pressed her finger to her sister's lips to stop her from speaking. Samantha's face was white with fear, then Vanessa realised why – they were not alone!



Terrified, Vanessa drew in a lungful of foul, dank air that smelled of mildew. Now painfully alert to every sound, she heard someone feeling along the moulding that framed the window, and what she saw next chilled her blood. Something that resembled a woman was leaning over the window seat. But it wasn't a woman. It was dark like a shadow, but had a faint glimmer to it as if it were wet, giving it a sheen like that of polished marble. Whatever it was, it seemed to be searching for something.

Vanessa drew the covers back over her head as slowly as she could. Samantha, now under the covers with her, was trembling with fright. Suddenly the mildewy air turned fresh and smelled of

grass and jasmine. Cautiously risking a peek out from under the covers, Vanessa cast a furtive glance at the window... but there was nothing there.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Vanessa sat up and turned on her bedside light. Samantha sat up too.

"Look!" Samantha cried. Vanessa followed her sister's horrified gaze to the hardwood floor. A line of small, dark footprints led from the door to the window.

"I'm getting Mum and Dad!" Samantha shrieked as she raced down the stairs with Vanessa close behind.

Their parents were still hard at work in the office. Their dad was pacing back and forth, reading through pages of the script, while their mother pecked at the keyboard.

"Dad! Mum!" Samantha shouted. "There was someone... something in our room!"

"Yeah," Vanessa gasped. "It was like a dark shadow, and it..."

"Calm down," their father said as he put his arms around his terrified daughters.

"It was a woman, but more like a shadow," Vanessa said with a shiver. "It was dark but it glowed..."

Samantha nodded absentmindedly, for her eyes had drifted to the script her parents were writing on the computer. She stared at the screen and mumbled, "It was dark like a shadow, but had a faint glimmer to it as if it were wet, giving it a sheen like that of polished marble. Whatever it was, it seemed to be searching for something."

"That's exactly..." Vanessa paused in disbelief when she realised that her sister was reading from the computer screen.

'The thing keeps up with its search,' Samantha read on. 'Horried, the young girl slowly draws the cover back over her head.' She stopped and slowly looked up at Vanessa. "It's all right here in the script," she said stiffly. "Even the part about the damp footprints."

"I don't understand," Vanessa said, looking from her father to her mother. "What you wrote - it came true. It really happened... to us."

Her father shook his head. "Maybe we're all just getting caught up in this thing," he said calmly. "You two probably just overheard your mother and I talking about the story, and without even realising it, you had a dream about the exact same thing."

"Of course. Your father's right," their mother agreed. "There are so many kinks in this plot, and we've been working so hard to get them ironed out. Somehow it all must be having an effect on you girls. That's the only possible explanation."

"No, Mum," Vanessa said softly. "I think this place really is haunted."

After their dad checked in every cupboard and corner in the girls' room, they agreed to go back to bed. Still, they insisted on leaving the light on.



The sun was just a glowing semicircle over the deep blue of the Atlantic when Samantha shook Vanessa awake. "Come on," she urged. "I want to go down to the well and see if the cover is still on."

Vanessa rubbed her eyes. "Are you sure that's a good idea?" she asked.

"Of course it is," Samantha insisted, tossing Vanessa's jeans on to the bed. "Think about it. How else would you explain those damp footprints?"

When they got near to the laurel hedge, the girls froze in their tracks. "This isn't possible," Vanessa said in disbelief. Samantha gaped wordlessly. Where the decrepit well should have been, draped in a chaotic web of grass and wild rosebushes, there now stood a pristine white gazebo.



Surrounding it was a dainty half circle of well-tended rosebushes.

Vanessa grabbed Samantha's hand and together they ran across the lawn and charged into the house.

"Mum! Dad!" Vanessa screamed.

"We're in here," her father called, appearing in the doorway to the office. "What's wrong?"

"It's the well," Samantha sputtered. "We went to see if there would be anything different about it after what happened last night, but it's completely gone! There's a gazebo there instead, and all the bushes have been trimmed, and..."

She stopped. Both of her parents were looking at her quizzically.

"What are you talking about?" her mother finally asked in a mystified tone. "There's no well around here."

"But there was," Vanessa answered uncertainly. "It was right behind the laurel hedge. I saw it."

Her father shook his head and grinned. "You would think that you two were the ones who stayed up working all night instead of us." He took a gulp of coffee from his ceramic mug. "There's no well back there. We just wrote about one."

"Your dad's right. We just made up the well," her mother said. "We just used our imagination, and I'll bet that's what you two are doing too... unless you're trying to play a joke on us."

Confused, Vanessa glanced at a bewildered-looking Samantha.

"Well, none of this matters anyway," their father said laughing. "The idea wasn't coming together, so we dropped it."

"Dropped it?" Vanessa asked.

"Yes. We deleted the file a few hours ago and started work on a new idea," he said.

"It's much more exciting. It's about this..."

Just then the telephone rang. "I'll tell you about it in a little while," their dad said, as he reached for the receiver and flopped on to the sofa.



No matter how hard her parents tried to explain away the strange things they'd seen, Vanessa was certain that all these weird occurrences had something to do with the script. Maybe their father had been right when he said that there was something about the old house that focused their creative energies, making the events they wrote about real. In any case, it no longer mattered. The script was gone, and so was the well, along with whatever lurked in its mouldy depths.

"Why don't we go and cook a nice hot breakfast?" she heard her mother saying. Vanessa turned to follow Samantha towards the kitchen, when she caught a few words of her dad's telephone conversation.

"You'll absolutely love it!" he was saying enthusiastically to someone on the other end of the line. "We stayed up all night to finish the first scene. It starts with this family that rents a house on the coast of Cornwall. It's a tranquil spot and the house is a great old place. You know the type...

old fashioned swing in the garden... beautiful white gazebo surrounded by rosebushes. Anyway..."

Vanessa stood riveted to the spot. "That's where the gazebo came from," she thought with a growing sense of dread.

"... the family is totally unaware that this huge asteroid is hurtling through

somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean just off the coast of Cornwall, and..."

"Noooooooo!" Vanessa howled as the ground began to tremble, then rock fiercely. "You've got to delete the script!"

But her warning was too late. The last thing Vanessa saw was the sky blazing from bright blue to fiery, brilliant white. Then the house shivered and swayed and finally burst into splinters of wood and showers of glass in the earth-shattering explosion that inevitably followed as an immense asteroid plunged into the Atlantic Ocean at the bottom of the cliff.

THE END

space on a collision course with Earth. We're talking about an asteroid the size of Mount Everest."

"No!" Vanessa screamed aloud at her father. "Don't you see. What you write in this house comes true!"

Her father looked at her sternly and held up his hand to quiet her as he continued his conversation, "So get this - it's all done in flashbacks. It begins when the asteroid hits. It splashes down

OUR HAUNTED WORLD



With a history stretching back longer than any other country, China has a wealth of spooky tales...

BOWLED OVER!

In southeast China, in a tomb dating from 960AD, two small, white glazed bowls have been found that are truly weird. When filled, the bowls turn black; when empty they turn white again. No one knows how. Drinking bowls like these could turn us all into perfect hosts, as we'd always know when a guest's cup needed a refill!

THE AFTER-LIFE ARMY

In 1974, a vast terracotta army (below) was discovered below Mt Lishan, at the tomb of the first Chinese Emperor. The 6000 life-sized terracotta soldiers were created to serve and guard the dead Emperor in what was believed to be an extremely dangerous after-life!



CENTURIES OF FIRE

A fire in a coalfield in the north-western province of Xinjiang was put out in 1997 – after raging for over 400 years! The coal spontaneously caught fire in 1560, and has been burning ever since.



A WALL FOR ALL TIME

Can you imagine building something so huge that it could be seen from the Moon? The Great Wall of China (above) was mostly built between 221 and 210BC and is a staggering 2700km long, with 25,000 sentry towers. The 10-metre-high wall is topped by a road along which five horseback warriors could ride side by side. The First Emperor ordered the Great Wall's construction to keep barbarians out of China, but he'd have been proud to know that it still stands, and that it can be seen from outer space (above right) and by any passing aliens!

'EATING' THE EVIL

In old China, if a neighbour built a new house with an ill-omened angle or roof pointing at another house, legal action was often taken. The principles of feng shui (say: foong shway) were – and still are – taken very seriously.

If the courts couldn't resolve the problem, the offended householder had no choice but to place an enormous baked clay dragon or other ferocious-looking monster on his own roof.

Facing the neighbour's house with its mouth wide open, all the evil influences and demons from the offending house would be swallowed by the monster, and the people living beneath it could feel a whole lot safer.

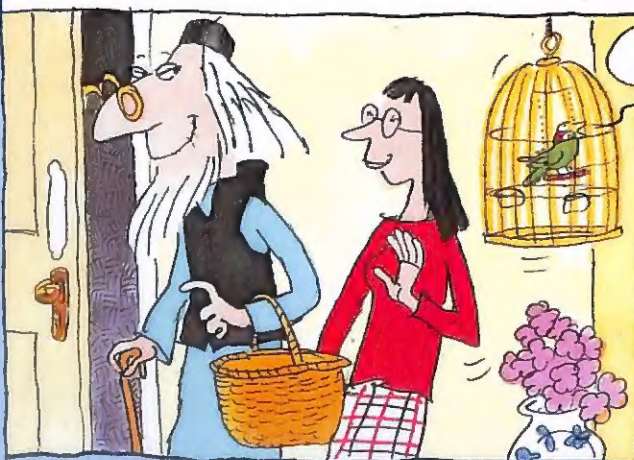
FREEDOM FLIGHT!

A friend of a friend heard this story in China...



1 A Chinese girl was staying with her old grandad in Beijing. His pride and joy was a little songbird that he kept in a hanging bamboo cage.

2 On his way out shopping one morning, the old man told the bird to sing for his grand-daughter while he went to the market.



3 The girl didn't approve of caged birds, and when it started clambering all over its cage, she decided it needed some exercise.



4 She carefully shut all of the windows and doors, then opened the door of the cage. The bird flew out excitedly.



5 It may even have been its first free flight, because it flew crazily round the room, did a couple of loops, then smashed into the ceiling light!



6 The girl realised her mistake when the bird crash-landed on the table!



7 When the bird was clearly unable to stand up, the girl saw that its wonky-looking leg was broken.



8 Tenderly, she made a little leg-splint from a matchstick, which she taped on to the broken leg.



9 Safely caged once more, the peg-legged bird seemed to cheer up. He even began to hop round the cage floor.



10 Sadly, when the splint slid down its leg a bit, the head of the match dragged along the cage floor and ignited.



...It's not known what grandad said when he found out that his feathered friend had gone up in smoke!

STONEHENGE

Special Investigation File: 44

Subject: a mysterious prehistoric site

Place: Salisbury Plain, England

SpineChiller creates a file

Evidence no: 44/1
An aerial view of Stonehenge.
The Heel Stone is at the front,
by the road

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The prehistoric monument of Stonehenge stands on Wiltshire's Salisbury Plain. It consists of a henge – a large, circular ditch surrounded by a high bank – and several circles of standing stones. People constructed the site in three stages, from about 3000 to 1500BC. At first they used bluestones from the Preseli Mountains in Pembrokeshire, South Wales, 217km away. Later they built with sarsens (sandstone blocks) from Marlborough Downs, 29km from the site.

Experts are now trying to discover the truth about two Stonehenge mysteries. First, how did people transport the stones to Salisbury Plain? Second, what did they use the monument for once it was built?

STONEHENGE STAGES

Following is my report on the three main Stonehenge building stages.

STAGE 1 – 3000 TO 2300BC

During these years, the henge was dug and two stones were erected to provide an entrance. The giant Heel Stone was placed about 30m from the entrance, and 56 pits were hollowed out in a circle just inside the ditch.

STAGE 2 – 2100 TO 2000BC

In this era, members of the Beaker Culture (so called because they made decorated beakers) built two circles of bluestones, one inside the other. They also made an avenue that led past the Heel Stone to the entrance.

STAGE 3 – 2000 TO 1500BC

During this time, a circle of upright stone blocks (sarsens) was built, linked by a ring of stones balanced across the top. Inside the circle, five arches, known as trilithons, were erected in a horseshoe shape. The bluestone circles were pulled down and reused to form another circle and horseshoe.



Evidence no: 44/2
John Aubrey

December 1921

LOST AND FOUND

Archaeologists have found 56 mysterious pits in the ground at Stonehenge. And they are really excited about their discovery, even though someone pipped them to the post – 258 years before, to be exact!

Just to prove there's no hard feelings, they've called the pits the 'Aubrey holes' after John Aubrey, the 17th-century writer who found them in 1663.

Although he was best known for his collection of gossip biographies called 'Brief Lives', Aubrey was also interested in ancient sites. When he made his discovery, he prepared a report for King Charles II, together with a plan showing their exact positions. The pits were later filled in and remained hidden – until now.

Evidence no: 44/3
Stonehenge at dusk on the shortest day of the year

SACRED SITE

By 2100 BC, Stonehenge was the most important sacred site in Britain. It may have been used as some or all of the following:

1 Astronomical calendar

Ancient people may have tracked the Sun, Moon and stars across the sky by comparing their movements with the positions of the stones.

2 Sun worship centre

The stone circles line up with the place where the Sun rises on the longest day of the year (the summer solstice). Sun worship may have taken place then and at other times.

3 Burial site

Archaeologists have found cremated human remains in various parts of Stonehenge, particularly the Aubrey holes. People may have been buried there in sacred ceremonies.

Evidence no: 44/4
The Preseli Mountains in Pembrokeshire, South Wales

Dear Rosie

February 1998

Your Mum tells me you need help with your project on Stonehenge. Well, here are my old school notes on how people transported the huge stones there.

1 Bluestones from the Preseli Mountains in Wales were probably dragged to the coast on rollers using ropes, then transported across the sea and down the River Avon by raft. Finally, they were put on rollers again and dragged to their destination.

2 In 1991, geologists found evidence to suggest that a giant glacier may have carried the Welsh stones to Stonehenge. But there is no firm proof.

3 Sarsens from the Marlborough Downs were probably also pulled along on rollers. Up to 1000 men would have been needed to drag each of the huge, 26-tonne stones.

I hope this information is useful.

Your loving Aunt

Poppy

Unexplained

Evidence no: 44/5
Police and New Age travellers at the Stonehenge site

CONCLUSION

By about 1000 BC, Stonehenge had been abandoned. But its ancient air of mystery remains. Today, people still gather there at the time of the summer solstice to perform sacred rituals. However, the police now try to keep them away in order to prevent damage to the massive, ancient stones.



Chapter 4

The Canterville Ghost

Retold from a story by Oscar Wilde

Mr Otis and the boys had failed to find Virginia. They walked up to the house in a state of depression. In the library they found poor Mrs Otis, almost out of her mind with worry. Mr Otis at once ordered supper for the whole party. It was a melancholy meal, as hardly anyone spoke. Afterwards, Mr Otis sent them all to bed, saying that nothing more could be done that night.

Just as they were leaving the dining-room, midnight boomed from the clock tower. Then there was a sudden shrill cry, a peal of thunder shook the house and unearthly music floated through the air. Next, a panel at the top of the staircase flew back, and Virginia stepped out, carrying a little casket. In a moment they had all rushed up to her. Mrs Otis clasped her in her arms, the Duke smothered her with kisses, and the twins did a wild war-dance round the group.

"Good heavens, child, where have you been?" said Mr Otis, rather angrily, thinking that she had been playing some foolish trick on them. "Cecil and I have been riding all over the country looking for you, and your mother has been frightened to death. You must never play these thoughtless practical jokes any more."

"My own darling, thank God you are found. You must never leave my side again," murmured Mrs Otis, as she kissed the trembling child. "Papa," said Virginia quietly, "I have been with the ghost. He is dead, and you must come and see him. He had been very wicked, but he was really sorry, and he gave me this box of jewels before he died."



The whole family gazed at her in amazement, but she was quite serious. Turning round, she led them through the opening in the wainscoting down a secret corridor. Washington followed with a lighted candle. Finally, they came to a great oak door. When Virginia touched it, it swung back on its hinges, and they found themselves in a low room with one tiny grated window. In the wall was a huge iron ring, and chained to it was a skeleton. It was stretched out on the stone floor, and seemed to be trying to grasp an old-fashioned trencher and ewer, that were just out of its reach. This was where Sir Simon had once starved to death.

Virginia knelt down beside the skeleton and began to pray silently. The rest of the party looked on in wonder.

"Hello!" exclaimed one of the twins, who had been looking out of the window to try to discover where in the house they were. "The withered almond tree has blossomed. I can see the flowers in the moonlight."

"God has forgiven him," said Virginia gravely as she rose to her feet, and a beautiful light illuminated her face.

"What an angel you are!" cried the young Duke, and kissed her.

Four days after these curious incidents, a funeral started from Canterville Chase at about eleven o'clock at night. The hearse was drawn by eight black horses with ostrich plumes on their heads. The coffin was covered by a purple pall, on which the Canterville coat-of-arms was embroidered in gold. By the side of the hearse and the coaches walked the servants with lighted torches. Lord Canterville was the chief mourner and sat in the first carriage along with Virginia. Then came

the United States minister and his wife, then Washington and the three boys, and in the last carriage was Mrs Umney. A grave had been dug in the corner of the churchyard, under the old yew-tree, and the service was read by the Rev Augustus Dampier.

When the ceremony was over, the servants extinguished their torches. Then, as the coffin was being lowered into the grave, Virginia stepped forward and laid on it a large cross made of white and pink almond blossoms. As she did so, the moon came out from behind a cloud and flooded the churchyard with silver light. From a distant copse a nightingale began to sing. Virginia thought about the prophecy on the



library window and about the ghost's description of the Garden of Death. Her eyes filled with tears and she hardly spoke during the drive home.

The next morning, Mr Otis spoke to Lord Canterville about the jewels that the ghost had given to Virginia. They were magnificent, especially a 16th-century ruby necklace, and their value was so great that Mr Otis felt unsure about allowing his daughter to accept them.

"My Lord," he said, "I know that in this country mortmain applies to trinkets as well as to land, and it is clear to me that these jewels are heirlooms in your family. I must beg you, accordingly, to take them, and to regard them simply as a portion of your property. My daughter is merely a child, and has as yet little interest in such luxury items. I am also informed by Mrs Otis, who knows a great deal about art, that these gems are very valuable. Under these circumstances, Lord Canterville, I feel sure that you will recognise how impossible it is for my family to keep them. Indeed, all such vain toys, however necessary to the dignity of the British aristocracy, would be out of place among those who believe in American simplicity.

"Perhaps I should also mention that Virginia is very anxious that you should allow her to keep the box as a memento of your unfortunate ancestor. As it is extremely old, and so a good deal out of repair, you may perhaps think fit to agree."

Lord Canterville listened gravely to the Minister's speech, pulling his moustache now and then to hide a smile. When Mr Otis had finished, he shook him by the hand and said, "My dear sir, your charming daughter provided a very important service to my unlucky ancestor, Sir Simon, and I and my family owe her a great deal. The jewels are clearly hers, and I believe that if I were heartless enough to take them, the wicked old fellow would be out of his grave in a fortnight, leading me a terrible life.

"What is more, the jewels are not heirlooms, because nothing is an heirloom that is not mentioned in a will or legal document. As the jewels' existence was unknown until now, they are accordingly

not mentioned anywhere. I assure you I have no claim on them, and when Miss Virginia grows up I dare say she will be pleased to have such pretty things to wear."

Mr Otis was greatly distressed at Lord Canterville's refusal, and begged him to reconsider. But the good-natured lord was quite firm, and persuaded the Minister to allow his daughter to keep the ghost's present.

Virginia married the young Duke of Cheshire as soon as he came of age. They were both so charming, and they loved each other so much, that everyone was delighted at the match – except Mr Otis. He was extremely fond of the young Duke personally, but he objected to titles, and was afraid that a pleasure-loving aristocrat would make his daughter forget the principles of American simplicity. But his objections were overruled, and when he walked up the aisle of St George's, Hanover Square, with his daughter on his arm, there was not a prouder man in England.

After the honeymoon was over, the Duke and Duchess went down to Canterville Chase. The day after their arrival, they walked over to the churchyard by the pine woods. It had been difficult to decide what to engrave on Sir Simon's tombstone, but finally they had put simply the initials of his name, and the verse from the library window.

The Duchess had brought with her some roses, which she scattered on the grave, and after she and the Duke had stood by it for some time, they strolled into the ruined abbey. There the Duchess sat down on a fallen pillar, while her husband lay at her feet, looking up at her beautiful eyes. Then he took her hand and said, "Virginia, a wife should have no secrets from her husband."

WORD POWER

melancholy – sorrowful; sad

trencher – a wooden board used as a plate

ewer – a large jug

pall – a heavy cloth

mortmain – a legal term for permanent ownership

heirlooms – items of property passed from one generation of a family to the next

memento – an object that acts as a reminder of a person, occasion or place

came of age – reached the legal age of adulthood (then 21)

"My dear Cecil! I have no secrets from you."

"Yes, you have," he answered, smiling. "You have never actually told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost."

"I have never told anyone, Cecil," said Virginia gravely.

"I know that, but you might tell me."

"Please don't ask me, Cecil, I cannot tell you. Poor Sir Simon! I owe him a great deal. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both."

The Duke rose and kissed his wife.

"Have your secret as long as I have your heart," he murmured.

"You have always had that, Cecil."

"And you will tell our children, won't you?" said the Duke.

Virginia blushed.

THE END

NEXT ISSUE:

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley



THE UNEXPLAINED ICE BOMBS

If tiny hailstones sting when they hit you, imagine what happens when great boulders of ice fall out of the sky. These enormous lumps of ice, known as ice bombs, hit the ground with an explosive bang and cause bomb-like damage.

There is no doubt that they exist – each year about a dozen cases are reported – but where they come from is still regarded as a mystery by some.

FLYING STINK BOMBS

The official line is that these icy missiles fall from passing planes. Occasionally, when aircraft anti-icing equipment fails, ice builds up on the wings and falls off in giant clumps. Even worse, waste ejected from aircraft toilets sometimes freezes on the way down and lands in smelly lumps!

Today, aircraft technology is so advanced that these incidents are very rare. So not all ice bombs can be blamed on passing planes.

▼ TROUBLE OVERHEAD!

If anti-icing equipment fails, this could be the dangerous result.



▲ **GREAT BALLS OF ICE**
Small ice bombs or gigantic hailstones? These tennis ball-sized lumps of ice fell during a hail-storm in USA in 1997 – ouch!

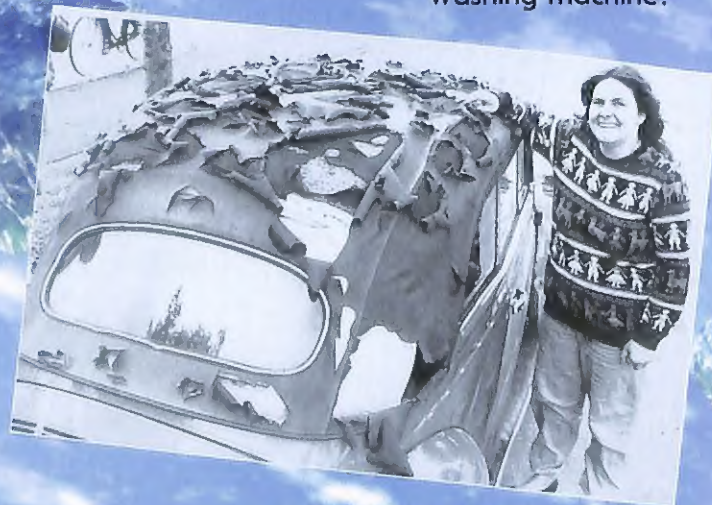
PRE-FLIGHT ICE

One reason why every ice bomb cannot be blamed on aircraft is that there have been accounts of them even before the first plane flew! 'The Times', in August 1849, ran a story on an ice mass – measuring six metres across – that smashed into fields in Ord, Scotland, narrowly missing a farmyard!

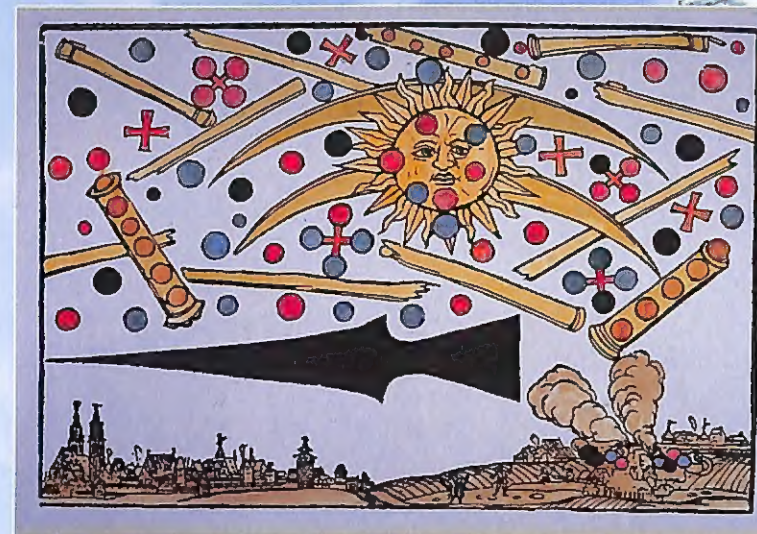
WATCH OUT!

If an ice bomb falls near you, especially if you are indoors at the time, you'll know about it!

In 1981, a slab of ice sliced through a rafter nearly two metres thick at the home of Michael Mogridge in Dorset. Michael had just left the room when the ice smashed through the roof and exploded 'just like a bomb going off'. He found a huge lump of ice sitting on the remains of his washing machine.



▲ **BOMBED TO BITS!**
This 'ice bombed' car was pelted with super-large hailstones.



▲ HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Strange things falling from the sky were recorded as long ago as 1561.

LAB LARKS

Very little research has been carried out to try to solve the ice bomb mystery, but when a lump of ice crashed on to the road in front of Dr Richard Griffiths in Manchester, in 1973, he decided to do some investigating of his own and stored the remains in his freezer.

First of all he dismissed the icy plane theory by checking flight logs at local airports. Then he analysed the ice at local laboratories and decided it was made from water that could be found in clouds. It was also made up in layers, rather like a hailstone. But the crystals that formed it were much larger than those normally found in hailstones. So where did these freak hailstones come from and why did they occur?

▼ KILLER ICE STORM

Huge hailstones collected after a storm in Texas, USA, that killed nine people.



SLABS FROM SPACE...

There is no hard evidence explaining where all ice bombs come from – but there are many theories. One is that huge flashes of lightning create electrostatic forces that, in turn, create huge ice blocks. There have been reports of loud bangs or flashes of lightning in clear blue skies just before an ice bomb strikes. Another theory is that hailstones combine to form one super-hailstone. And then there is the possibility is that ice slabs from space enter the Earth's atmosphere – just like meteorites – and come crashing to the ground.

Theories aside, most ice bombs are still unexplained – what do you think?

IF AN ICE BOMB FALLS NEAR YOU...

- take a photograph
- call your local university physics department or weather station. They may want to analyse it
- check your nearest airport for flight records – did a plane pass overhead at the exact time the bomb fell?

Spooky Stage Puzzles

MASK MYSTERY

Hidden in the picture are masks of tragedy (sad) and comedy (happy) – familiar theatre symbols. How many of each can you find?

CURTAIN UP

But what's playing? Can you work out these five well-known Shakespearean titles?



PANTOMIME PROPS

Pick out five items from the props basket and name the pantomimes they come from.

FEARSOME FACTS

Many stage performers observe long-held superstitions. For example, whistling in a dressing-room is reckoned to bring bad luck. But wearing squeaky shoes or carrying a cane on to the stage are lucky!

TAKE YOUR SEAT

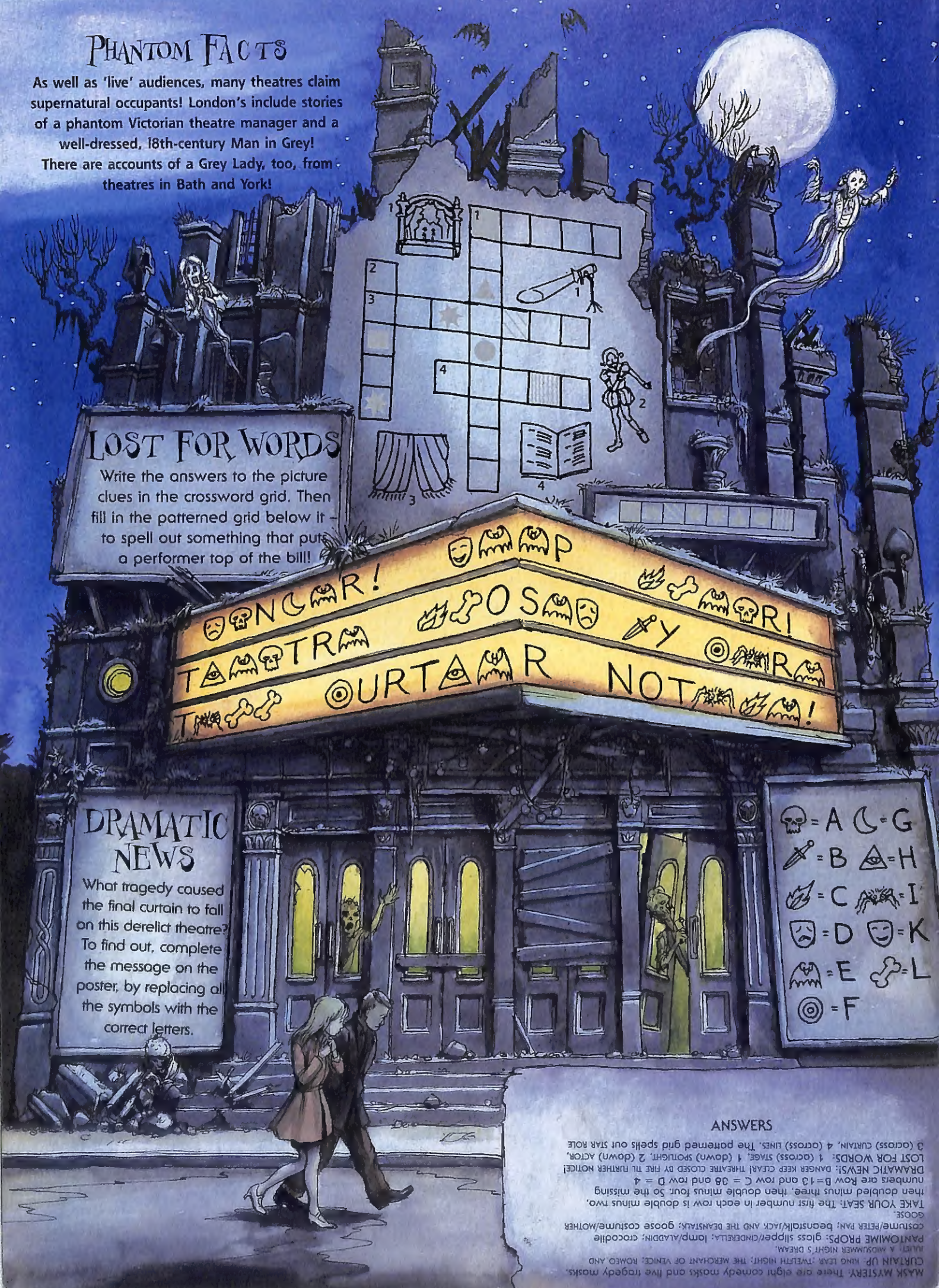
Nothing's normal in this theatre – including the seat numbers in rows A, B, C, and D. Can you work out the three missing numbers?

FANTASTIC FACTS

More than 60 years ago, a mind-reader on stage at a small theatre in Canada suddenly announced he could help an off-duty policeman, sitting among the shocked audience, to solve a murder. He did, too!

As well as 'live' audiences, many theatres claim supernatural occupants! London's include stories of a phantom Victorian theatre manager and a well-dressed, 18th-century Man in Grey! There are accounts of a Grey Lady, too, from theatres in Bath and York!

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CURTAIN UP! KING LEAR: INVERTED NIGHT; THE MERCHANT OF VENICE; ROMEO AND JULIET; A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.
PANTOMIME PROP: glass slipper/CINDERELLA; lamp/LADY; crocodile
PANTOMIME/PIETER PAN; BEASTSLICKER AND THE BEASTSLICK; GOOSE COSTUME/MOTHER GOOSE.
TAKE YOUR SEAT. The first number in each row is double minus two,
then doubled minus three, then double minus four, so the missing
numbers are Row B=13 and row C = 38 and row D = 4
DRAMATIC NEWS: PANGER KEEP CLEAR! THEATRE CLOSED BY FIRE! THE FURTHER NOTICE
LOST FOR WORDS: 1 (across) stage, 1 (down) spotlight, 2 (down) actor,
3 (across) curtain, 4 (across) PINE. The patterned gift spells out STAR ROSE